DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 388 179 HE 028 722

| | |
|---|---|
| TITLE | Joint Statement: Quality Assessment and Quality Audit. |
| INSTITUTION | Higher Education Quality Council, London (England).; Scottish Higher Education Funding Council, Edinburgh. |
| PUB DATE | Jun 94 |
| NOTE | 14p. |
| AVAILABLE FROM | Scottish Higher Education Funding Council, Donaldson House, 97 Haymarket Terrace, Edinburgh EH12 5HD, Scotland, United Kingdom. |
| PUB TYPE | Guides - General (050) |
| EDRS PRICE | MF01/PC01 Plus Postage. |
| DESCRIPTORS | Accountability; Agency Cooperation; *Audits (Verification); *Educational Assessment; Educational Quality; Evaluation Methods; Foreign Countries; Government School Relationship; *Higher Education; Legal Responsibility; Quality Control; Responsibility; Standards |
| IDENTIFIERS | *Scotland |

ABSTRACT

This document sets out the respective responsibilities of the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council (SHEFC) and the Higher Education Quality Council (HEQC) as they currently stand in the field of higher education quality assurance. The SHEFC and the HEQC are both agencies that fulfill legislatively mandated quality assessment and control functions. Quality audits are external evaluations that guarantee that institutions have suitable quality control mechanisms in place. Quality assessment is external review of and judgments about the quality of teaching and learning in institutions. A section on quality audits establishes that these are the responsibility of HEQC for all of the United Kingdom. This section outlines how the audits are conducted and who auditors are. Following this section on quality assessment states that the SHEFC conducts these within a framework that encompasses the diversity of institutions and students found in Scottish institutions of higher education. This section describes assessment objectives, varieties of assessors, and the assessment procedures. Further sections describe cooperation mechanisms and areas of cooperation including documentation, reports, guidance notes, visit scheduling, training, and evaluation for both councils. (JB)

**********
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
**********

ED 388 179

Scottish Higher Education
Funding Council

# Joint Statement
# Quality Assessment and Quality Audit

HEQC

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☒ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Scottish Higher Educ.
Funding Council

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

HE028 722

June 1994



BEST COPY AVAILABLE

# Quality Assessment and Quality Audit

## Purpose

1. This document sets out, for the guidance of institutions, the respective responsibilities of the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council (SHEFC) and the Higher Education Quality Council (HEQC) as they currently stand in the field of quality assurance.

## Background

2. The present arrangements for quality assurance stem from the 1991 White Paper 'Higher Education - A New Framework' (Cm 1541). The White Paper distinguished between quality audit (*"external scrutiny aimed at providing guarantees that institutions have suitable quality control mechanisms in place"*) should be the task of a single unit in which the institutions had the major stake. Quality assessment (*"external review of, and judgements about, the quality of teaching and learning in institutions"*) would be the responsibility of quality assessment units to be established within each Funding Council.

3. Accordingly, Section 39(1)(a) of the Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act 1992 requires the Funding Council to *"secure that provision is made for assessing the quality of education in institutions for whose activities they provide, or are considering providing, financial support"*.

4. Quality audit is one of the functions of the HEQC, an organisation established by the bodies representing the universities and colleges to contribute to the maintenance and improvement of quality in institutions of higher education in the United Kingdom.

5. Both Councils recognise that the prime responsibility for maintaining and enhancing the quality of teaching and learning rests with each individual institution. Both audit and assessment are designed to work in partnership with, and reinforce, institutions' internal quality assurance processes and efforts. To assist with this objective, both audit and assessment have institutional self-assessment as a central element in their processes. Moreover, the great majority of auditors and assessors are drawn from universities and colleges. The remainder of this document

provides a summary description of the two processes and indicates the steps the Councils are taking to work together in order to maximise the effectiveness of their efforts and minimise any duplication of demand on institutions.

# Quality Audit

6. The HEQC is responsible for undertaking academic quality audits of institutions of higher education in the whole of the United Kingdom. The scope of audit is wide, covering activities which are privately or publicly funded, and includes postgraduate provision as well as degree and diploma programmes. The objectives of audit are:

   - on behalf of HEIs, to provide an effective mechanism for transmitting information and judgements about how HEIs individually and collectively fulfil their common responsibilities for maintaining and enhancing the quality of their educational provision and the standards of their awards; and

   - on behalf of HEIs, to provide an effective mechanism which will contribute to the improvement of the quality of education enjoyed by students and to the maintenance of the standards of the awards they receive, by assisting HEIs to develop, maintain and improve their approaches to the quality control of their educational provision.

7. The HEQC does this by considering and reviewing the mechanisms and structures used by individual institutions to monitor, assure, promote and enhance their academic quality and standards, in the light of their stated aims and objectives. It also comments on the extent to which such procedures in place in individual institutions reflect appropriate good practice in maintaining and enhancing quality and are applied effectively. Audit is concerned principally with how institutions manage and discharge their corporate obligation and responsibility for the quality of their educational provision. It is not concerned with the details of individual courses, programmes, or awards, but rather with how institutions satisfy and assure themselves about the standards and quality of the courses, programmes and awards they offer. Quality audit is, essentially, a sampling process. Audit teams will seek through careful sampling and focused enquiries to review the effectiveness of quality assurance arrangements. This often results in 'audit trails' which consist of a line of questioning (relating to a quality assurance issue) followed through a particular department or administrative area.

8. The audit procedure involves small groups of experienced auditors scrutinising institutions' procedures in the light of documentation supplied and in the course of three-day visits. The auditors examine in detail how an institution says it determines and monitors the quality of:

- its design, approval and review of programmes of study;
- its teaching, learning and progress of students;
- its student assessment and degree classification procedures;
- its staff development, promotion and reward procedures;
- its feedback and enhancement arrangements; and
- the content of its promotional material relating to academic provision.

Audit reports (which are published) describe the quality assurance systems in place and offer judgements on their effectiveness, commend good practice and highlight areas that may need further development. The audit reports do not seek to categorise institutions or to make comparisons.

9. Auditors are, for the most part, senior academics or managers, selected from nominations made by institutions and recruited to undertake up to ten audits over three years. They are paid an honorarium, and their employing institutions are also paid a sum to compensate for the loss of their time. A three-part induction course aims to introduce new auditors to the theory and practice of quality assurance and audit, to provide an opportunity to observe an audit, and to develop the particular skills associated with the evaluation of quality assurance systems.

10. The work of the HEQC's Quality Assurance Group (QAG) is overseen by a Steering Council, which has important lay representation. The Group has a full-time staff of 10, and between 60 and 70 auditors at any one time. Its work is complemented by that of the Quality Enhancement Group (QEG) which provides services to support institutions' efforts to enhance the quality of teaching and learning.

11. The QAG and its predecessor body, the CVCP's Academic Audit Unit, had undertaken, by the end of March 1993, 105 audits of institutions or of institutional arrangements for the validation of courses provided elsewhere. The remainder of the United Kingdom's higher education institutions will

be audited at the rate of 50 to 60 a year. Present intentions are to undertake brief 'review audits' of institutions after three years and full re-visits (with revised terms of reference) every six years. These intentions may be reconsidered in the light of the independent evaluation of the audit process (para. 30).

# Quality Assessment

12. The SHEFC recognises the diversity of institutional mission within the higher education sector, and has adopted a framework for quality assessment which encompasses the breadth and depth of the student learning experience and student achievement, examined within the context of an institution's own aims and objectives.

13. The Council is agreed that the objectives of quality assessment are:

- to analyse the findings of quality assessment exercises in order to monitor trends in the general level of quality of provision and its relationship to resource requirements;

- to produce brief reports which identify strengths and weaknesses, promote good practice, and stimulate necessary improvements;

- to inform customers such as students and employers on the quality of educational provision on offer, thereby promoting competition and choice;

- to form the basis of advice on the promotion and maintenance of quality through innovations and developments in curriculum, teaching, and student assessment practice; and

- to inform funding and reward excellence.

14. The Council's assessment method acknowledges an institution's own view of its strengths and weaknesses in a particular discipline or subject area, as expressed through its self-assessment. The assessment method for any given subject area has three main elements:

a. an institutional self-assessment in the subject;

b. analysis of the self-assessment by lead assessors drawn from higher education institutions; and

c. judgement on the quality of education after an assessment visit by a team of assessors.

15. Assessors are of three varieties: lead assessors, academic assessors and industrial assessors.

- ***Lead Assessors*** are academic specialists in the cognate area who take responsibility for overseeing the whole programme of assessment in that area, supported by the staff of the Directorate. They may be seconded from their institutions full-time or part-time for a period of months, to cover the whole process of preparing for assessment (including the scrutiny of the self-assessment document), organising institutional visits, and writing up reports.

- ***Academic Assessors*** are also specialists from the institutions working in the cognate area, but make their services available on a day-by-day basis for visiting particular institutions, for training and for report writing. While they are drawn predominantly from other Scottish higher educational institutions, a number come from institutions in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. These assessors provide a necessary element of independence and neutrality.

- ***Industrial Assessors*** are drawn from outside the academic world, and represent broader vocational and social interests which will be served by graduates qualified in the cognate area. Their role is to focus in particular on the extent to which the qualification matches these broader requirements.

All assessors undergo a three-day intensive training programme led by staff in the Quality Assessment Branch of the Funding Council. All assessors are paid a fee for each assessment visit. However, in the case of quality assessors drawn from higher education institutions the fees are paid direct to institutions.

16. The assessment method provides for four assessment categories: excellent, highly satisfactory, satisfactory and unsatisfactory. As indicated above, all institutions receive an assessment visit.

17. The SHEFC began the programme of assessment visits in January 1993 with assessments in economics and electrical and electronic engineering. Assessment of these subject areas was completed in March 1993 and reports published in June 1993. Assessment visits in civil engineering, mechanical engineering, physics, chemistry, geography, geology, environmental sciences, mathematics and statistics, and computing studies took place in academic year 1993-94 and have now been completed. Advisory Groups have been established to provide advice to the SHEFC on the content of the quality assessment programme. The membership of these groups is drawn from higher education institutions.

18. All departments to be assessed receive a 'pre-visit'. The primary purposes of the pre-visit are to confirm the dates of the main assessment visit, settle the sample of provision to be assessed and make arrangements for collection and submission of students' work. The main assessment visit normally occupies three days within one working week, during which the team of three to five assessors, depending on the scale of provision, meet students and staff, view facilities and observe teaching and learning.

19. At the end of the visit, subject assessors meet with representatives of the institutions in order to provide an opportunity, inter alia, to ensure that assessors have the complete evidence base on which the assessment will be founded. At this stage, no overall judgement on the outcome of the visit is conveyed to institutions. Following the visit, subject assessors prepare a draft written report for discussion with senior management in the institution. The purpose of the discussion is to provide a final check on matters of factual accuracy and to give feedback on the findings of the assessment team. As before, feedback stops short of an overall summative assessment. The Quality Assessment Committee receive and consider reports on assessments carried out by the Council, and make recommendations to Council on the publication of reports. Published reports are available within six months of the completion of all assessment visits in a cognate area. A report providing additional information on the assessor's judgements in the published report is also made available to the institution for developmental purposes. The judgements of assessors are made in relation to the institution's own mission and aims and objectives.

20. Scottish higher education institutions were consulted in August 1992 on the Council's approach to quality assessment. The consultation included consideration of issues such as the quality assessment framework and its appropriateness for assessing the quality of provision on offer in higher education, the introduction of institutional self-evaluation, and the length of the cycle for conducting quality assessments. A five-year quality assessment programme was published in the light of the responses to the consultation exercise.

## Co-operation Mechanisms

21. The formal mechanism for co-operation is through the two Councils' officers acting as observers on each other's main committees, with a SHEFC representative on the HEQC Quality Audit Steering Council, and an HEQC

representative on the SHEFC Quality Assessment Committee. In addition there are regular meetings of officers of the two Councils and occasional meetings of Council members and Board directors.

## Areas of Co-operation

22. Collaborative activity between the SHEFC and HEQC is being developed in a number of areas.

### Documentation

23. In the interests of not overburdening institutions, the Councils use, wherever possible, information which institutions have already prepared for their own internal quality assurance procedures. Also, both Councils use, where appropriate, material prepared for the other's purposes.

### Reports

24. The SHEFC and HEQC publish all quality assessment and audit reports, and copies are exchanged between the two Councils. HEQC's Quality Enhancement Group has the remit to draw on the outcomes of audit in the facilitation of quality enhancement across higher education. The HEQC quality audit reports are focused at institutional level, while the SHEFC assessment reports are focused at subject or discipline level. Where available, the two Councils use each other's reports to inform audits and assessments as appropriate.

### Guidance Notes

25. HEQC's auditors are guided in their work by the *'Notes for the Guidance of Auditors'*, which provides an account of the audit method, as well as an extensive 'checklist' illustrating the concerns of audit, and the sorts of questions that might be asked about them. Audit is not prescriptive about the ways in which quality may be assured. The *'Guidelines on Quality Assurance'* published by HEQC after extensive system-wide consultation offer common reference points for institutions and audit teams. SHEFC assessors are guided by the *'Assessors' Handbook'*. This outlines for subject specialist assessors the objectives, method and procedures related to assessments of the quality of education. It is also concerned with the protocol, procedures and conduct of an assessment visit.

## Scheduling of Visits

26. The SHEFC aims to give institutions at least three months' notice of an assessment visit. HEQC and SHEFC inform each other of their audit and assessment schedules with the aim of avoiding simultaneous visits. It has been agreed that audit visits will not normally carry out an 'audit trail' in a subject area currently being assessed, about to be assessed, or recently assessed, by the SHEFC. (This is subject to local circumstances; some institutions are now building the assessment procedures into their own quality assurance systems, and welcome an audit of procedures).

## Training

27. Both Councils put considerable effort into the preparation and training of auditors and assessors in order to ensure that they are properly prepared for their assignments.

28. Initial discussions on the possibilities of joint training have indicated that SHEFC and HEQC training responsibilities have some common ground, though many differences, reflecting the different purposes of the two processes. Each year the SHEFC trains about 120 subject specialist assessors whereas the HEQC trains 25 auditors.

# Evaluation

29. Both Councils are continually searching for ways in which the processes for which they are responsible can be made more effective in achieving their objectives. Both Councils conduct periodic evaluations.

30. An independent evaluation of the audit process was completed at the end of 1993. The general aim was to see whether and how the audit method might need to be adapted to meet the needs of a larger and more diverse higher education sector educating students for a wider range of purposes. The following were the terms of reference:

    a. to review the aims and objectives of the audit process as carried out by the HEQC and its predecessor, the CVCP Academic Audit Unit, and to evaluate the extent to which these have been achieved;

    b. to consider and suggest ways in which the process might be discharged more cost-effectively; and

    c. to consider and suggest ways in which the audit process might be further developed (either alone or in conjunction with other processes) to give assurance that the

institutions audited (i) manage their resources so as to enhance the educational processes and (ii) provide education of acceptable quality.

The results of this evaluation have been sent to all HEIs in the UK.

31. The SHEFC appointed an independent researcher to undertake a review of the operation of the quality assessment method operated by the Council. The review was completed in August 1993 and copies of the report have been circulated to all higher education institutions in Scotland. The Council intends to commission further reviews on a regular basis.

## Further Information

32. Further information about SHEFC can be obtained as follows:

- General information and publications (Margaret Robertson, tel. 031-313 6582)
- SHEFC relationship with HEQC (Maureen Masson, tel. 031-313 6517)
- Quality assessment issues (Harry Mitchell, tel. 031-313 6512) or Maureen Masson (as above).

33. Further information about HEQC can be obtained as follows:

- General information and publications (Bridget Rogers on 071-837 2223)
- HEQC relationships with the Funding Councils and quality enhancement issues (Clare Matterson on 071-837 2223)
- Quality audit issues (Brenda Fisher on 021-455 8282).

## HEQC Publications

The following publications can be obtained from the Higher Education Quality Council, 344-354 Gray's Inn Road, London WC1X 8BP.

*Higher Education Quality Council* - free of charge
*Guidelines on Quality Assurance (1994)* - £10 each
*Checklist for Quality Assurance Systems (1994)* - £2 each
*Notes for the Guidance of Auditors* -£4 each
*Audit Reports* - £5 each

## SHEFC Publications

The following publications can be obtained from the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council, Donaldson House, 97 Haymarket Terrace, Edinburgh EH12 5HD.

Quality Assessment Reports
*(Economics, Electrical and Electronic Engineering, Civil Engineering and Mechanical Engineering)* - £2 each
*Quality Assessment Annual Report for 1992-93* - £5 each
*Quality Assessors' Handbook* - £5 each
*Quality Assessment - An Evaluation* - £5 each

Higher Education Quality Council
344-354 Gray's Inn Road
London WC1X 8BP
Tel: 071-837 2223
Fax: 071-278 1676
or
13 Bath Street
Glasgow G2 1HY
Tel: 041-353 3445
Fax: 041-353 2098

Scottish Higher Education Funding Council
Donaldson House
97 Haymarket Terrace
Edinburgh EH12 5HD
Tel: 031-313 6500
Fax: 031-313 6501
© SHEFC 1994

BEST COPY AVAILABLE



BEST COPY AVAILABLE